

Which freshwater fishes are being listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is listing the Cumberland darter, rush darter, yellowcheek darter, chucky madtom, and laurel dace as endangered species, without critical habitat. A proposed critical habitat designation will be published in the *Federal Register* following publication of the final listing rule.

The Cumberland darter is found only in the upper Cumberland River system above Cumberland Falls in Kentucky and Tennessee. This species historically inhabited 21 streams in the upper Cumberland River system. Currently the species is known to survive in short reaches, less than 1 mile, along 12 streams.

The rush darter is found only in the Tombigbee-Black Warrior drainage in Alabama. Historically, rush darters have been found in three watersheds in Alabama. Currently, they are still found in the same three watersheds but in a more limited distribution.

The yellowcheek darter is found only in the Little Red River basin in Arkansas. Yellowcheek darters still inhabit most streams within their historical range, but in greatly reduced numbers in the Middle, South, Archey, and Beech forks of the Little Red River.

The chucky madtom is found only in the upper Tennessee River system in Tennessee. Currently, only three specimens have been collected from one stream (Little Chucky creek) since 2000.

The laurel dace is known historically from seven streams on the Walden Ridge portion of the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee. The current distribution of laurel dace comprises six of the seven streams that were historically occupied, but in shorter reaches. In these six streams they are known to occupy reaches of approximately 0.2 to 5 miles in length.

Why are these fishes being protected?

The Cumberland darter, rush darter, yellowcheek darter, chucky madtom, and laurel dace have declined throughout their historical ranges due to physical habitat destruction and modification resulting from a variety of human-induced impacts such as siltation, disturbance of river bank corridors, and changes in channel structure. For example, several streams within the Cumberland darter's current range that are identified as impaired due to siltation from mining, logging, and agricultural activities. These including Jenneys Branch (Indian Creek basin), an unnamed tributary of Jenneys Branch (Indian Creek basin), Ryans Creek (Jellico Creek basin), Marsh Creek, and Wolf Creek (Clear Fork basin). Also, expanding natural gas development activities that began in the

upper Little Red River watershed in 2006 require large quantities of surface water and groundwater. These activities pose an imminent threat to the continued existence of yellowcheek darter because they are expanding and increasing in the watersheds of all four forks

Surviving populations of these fishes all have limited geographic ranges and small population sizes. Their small ranges also make them vulnerable to droughts or toxic spills. Without protection, these fishes are likely to become extinct in the foreseeable future.

For more information:

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